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### **Entirely Not *Gone With the Wind* A Textile Survey at the Harry Ransom Center**

The project measures the condition of a range of textile items in the costume, personal effects, performing arts and film collections at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin. The tool was developed during the summer and spring of 2008 by a team of curators and conservators. My role was to assess the items during the 2008-2009 academic year, with the assistance of an undergraduate intern. In total 465 items were surveyed, spanning 56 collections.

The project produced several outcomes. The project provides a complete inventory of the collections, identifies the storage needs of items, guides future surveys and generates data to help preserve the collections.

#### *Project Highlights*

- The survey instrument has a four-part structure consisting of bibliographic information, material type, item condition and item storage. The survey looks at structural and surface condition, the condition of fasteners and trim additions, insect evidence and provides an overall condition assessment.
- Structural condition addresses questions such as the level of tears, the presence of shattering, losses (holes), runs, splitting, brittleness and loose threads.
- Surface condition looks at changes in the item due to fading, discoloration, staining, residue or changes in the appearance and fiber strength due to creases and wrinkles.
- The authors of the instrument defined the four damage levels, 0-3. A “0” is immaculate, a “1” has minimal damage, a “2” has several signs of damage and a “3” shows significant deterioration. Each type of deterioration on the survey received the 0-3 rating. The overall condition used a 1-3 scale.

#### *Findings*

- Of the 465 items surveyed, 74 items (16%) received a rating of “3” in overall condition. More than half of the items surveyed (56%) rated “2” in overall condition. 130 items (28%) are in good overall condition, with little or no damage, receiving a “1” or a “0”.

*Percentages of high level deterioration below reflect items with a 2 and 3 rating in overall condition.*

- Just over 60% of the entire population has some indication of staining, with 41% showing a high level of staining.
- Fading is defined as a reaction on the surface due to light damage, and discoloration is defined as color change not due to staining or light damage. Less than 9% exhibit substantial fading and 27% of the items have significant discoloration.
- Creases are evident on 65% of the items, with 42% of the items showing a significant amount of wrinkles. The creases and wrinkles reveal a need for re-housing.
- Just fewer than 5% of collection items have a high level of tears and almost 6% of the items exhibit shattering. Approximately 33% have some level of loss (holes). 17.4% have significant open seam damage, 9.2% have severe brittleness and 7.2% show signs of splitting.

#### *Preliminary Results*

- *Certain types of damage appear to yield higher levels of overall damage for an item.*

Significant evidence of staining, fading, discoloration, creases and/or wrinkles give the strongest indication of items with severe surface damage. Evidence of tears, losses (holes), open seams, shattering, brittleness and splitting tend to reflect items with the greatest amount of structural damage.

- *Surface damage seems dependent upon the amount of damage whereas structural damage seems dependent on both the amount of damage and on the severity and placement of the actual damage.*

Staining throughout an item, for example, displays more wear than minimal staining. An open seam attaching the bodice and the skirt is more critical than an open seam at the hem or on the lining.

- *Many of the items with the highest level of overall deterioration reflect a combination of both types of damage.*

An off-white long-sleeved button-down shirt from the Arthur Conan Doyle collection, for example, has an open seam along one arm, loose threads and severe wrinkling as well as significant staining.